



COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL SERVICES, VETERANS, CULTURE, AND  
RECREATION AND THE NORTHAMPTON CITY COUNCIL

*Councilor Marianne LaBarge, Chair*

*Councilor Alisa F. Klein*

*Councilor Gina-Louise Sciarra*

MEETING MINUTES  
PUBLIC HEARING ON VIBRANT SIDEWALKS  
OCTOBER 15, 2014  
Florence Civic Center, 90 Park St  
Florence, MA

Meeting minutes

1. **Meeting Called to Order:** At 7:00 pm, Councilor Marianne LaBarge called the Committee on Social Services, Veterans, Culture and Recreation to order.

In keeping with the Open Meeting Law, this meeting is also publicized as a City Council Meeting. Other members of City Council present include: Councilor Jesse Adams, and Councilor Maureen Carney, and Councilor Ryan O'Donnell.

2. *Councilor Jesse Adams read into the record the resolution on Vibrant Sidewalks.*

Public Comments:

- Ruth McGrath of 52 Longview Drive in Florence feels that benches in downtown Florence are important. She avoids shopping in Florence because she is disabled and needs opportunities to stop and sit. Benches will bring her business back to Florence. Since there are a limited number of places to sit, Ms. McGrath is unable to walk from one end of the center of Florence to the other.
- Patte Shaughnessy, the City's ADA Coordinator, encourages benches in many locations in Florence. She feels that this is an important issue for not only people with disabilities, but for everyone. The disabled and elderly need not only benches, but also clean sidewalks with no litter or cracks.
- Chris Polames of 659 Park Hill Road spoke about his concern for upkeep of sidewalks. In many locations of the city sidewalks are deteriorated. Also, the slope of sidewalks should be looked at so that those with disabilities can maneuver streets in wheelchairs. Specifically mentioned was the slope on the East Side of Main Street. Mr. Polames feels that benches with armrests are important.
- Bud Stockwell of 240 Audobon Road in Leeds agrees with about 90% of what the Resolution addresses. He spoke about the issue of people panhandling; some people panhandle because that is their job and giving to a panhandler can be compared to giving money to a charity. Poverty is not a crime it is a constitutional right—He feels as though panhandling should not be

encouraged. Mr. Stockwell commented that there is no panhandling in Springfield because it is not allowed.

- Robert Ross of 40 Keyes St., indicated that he is representing the Florence Civic and Business Association. Mr. Ross is concerned that there is a movement for benches in downtown Florence. He feels that there was not adequate communication with the area businesses. He indicated that the businesses feel as though there are enough benches already. He compares benches in Florence to what has happened with benches in downtown Northampton. Regarding the mention of urban development, there is no reference to a specific study that has been done. He feels that parking is different in Florence than in downtown Northampton. Parking for businesses in Florence support a service oriented community where people drive to the location where they want to conduct business. Northampton, on the other hand, is a place where people will park and shop. Because of the business model in Florence, Mr. Ross feels that handicapped spaces are not necessary or possible for every business. Regarding the recent road paving in Florence, Mr. Ross is disappointed that didn't Florence improvements didn't include brick sidewalks or Victorian lampposts. He would rather have those than park benches.
- Councilor Maureen Carney indicated that the Resolution was drafted in response to public outcry for benches in Northampton. There were two studies done in reference to downtown, but are general. While there is nothing specific to Florence, some of the details in the report can be applied to the Florence community.
- Suzanne Love of 109 Ryan Road in Florence thinks benches are a great idea. She feels that they make downtown a more welcoming place to go. More improvements that could be done include a good place to park bikes and armrests on benches. Ms. Love noted that bike lanes in Northampton are fading and should be repainted. Ms. Love suggested that perhaps people could use the need for benches as an opportunity to pursue an artistic endeavor. The City should consider a competition for bench design(s).
- Bill Newman of 61 Lyman road likes benches; he thinks they add a lot to the downtown community and the ambiance of the town. He has some concern about the use of the word "confrontation." In the Resolution. Perhaps there is a better word to represent what is really being talked about here, which is a robust freedom of expression and assembly. The first sentence of resolution doesn't make much sense to him. Under Article 16 of the Massachusetts Declaration of Rights, freedom of expression is a protected activity. A person can stand with a can and ask for donations; everyone is free to walk away and say, "No".
- Rutherford Platt, who has an office off of Pleasant Street, feels that one of the things that cause problems among sidewalk users is that people are too packed together. On Pleasant Street the sidewalks are really too narrow and that there are all kinds of things cluttering up available walking space: low overhead signs, parking meters, sandwich boards, etc. Although Mr. Rutherford finds Main Street okay in general, he feels that there is a problem getting across the street.

- Debin Bruce of 46 Columbus Ave. indicated that she hopes this is a broader discussion than just benches. She wants sidewalks improved. She suggested that the DPW reporting system for potholes should be expanded to include a sidewalk reporting process for cracks and missing bricks and that sort of thing.

*At 7:45 pm, Councilor Klein made a motion to close the Public Hearing; Councilor Sciarra seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a voice vote of 3 Yes, 0 No.*